

2206 9a. 71. 6
*The Jewish Dispensation consider'd and vindicated,
with a View to the Objections of Unbelievers, and
particularly of a late Author called the Moral
Philosopher.*

A
S E R M O N

Preach'd before the
UNIVERSITY
O F
O X F O R D,

At St. *M A R T*'s,

On Sunday, *October 23^d*. 1737.

By *FRANCIS WEBBER*, D. D.
Rector of *Exeter* College.

THE SECOND EDITION.

O X F O R D,

8 Printed at the THEATRE for JAMES FLETCHER in the
Turl, and Sold by J. and J. RIVINGTON in St. Paul's
Church-Yard, London. MDCCLI.

2662

Imprimatur,



THEOPH. LEIGH,

Vice-Can. OXON.

Jan. 12th. 1738.

DEUT. XIV. 2.

For thou art an holy People unto the Lord thy God, and the Lord hath chosen thee to be a peculiar People unto himself above all the Nations that are upon the Earth.

THERE are no objections which more sensibly affect religion in general, or which are urg'd with more success against particular branches of revelation, than such as are drawn from the unequal dispensations of providence in the government of the moral world. When the Deity is represented as dealing in an arbitrary or partial manner with his creatures, as professing himself the God and immediate governor of a particular favourite people to the prejudice or exclusion of others, and as confining the blessings both of revelation and temporal prosperity to that one nation; these are difficulties which have been thought not only inexplicable to human reason, but entirely irreconcilable with the supposition of a being of infinite wisdom and justice. Hence plausible objections are raised against the divine original of the Jewish

oeconomy, and, together with the authority of their sacred books, their religion itself is considered as of mere human institution, no better than the contrivance of a wise and politick legislator. And, which seems to add weight to this way of reasoning, the character and temper of the Jewish people were such as could by no means entitle them to particular marks of divine grace and favour. They are every where represented not only by unbelievers, (from whom they can expect no better treatment) but even by their own writers, as a most *perverse and stiff-necked generation*, as prone to the grossest idolatry, and continually revolting from the true GOD; and so remarkably insensible of those peculiar privileges they enjoy'd, that they might deserve rather to be looked upon as the most corrupt and degenerate part of mankind, than an holy and sanctified people of the Lord.

In answer to these difficulties it might indeed be said, that to pretend to search into the secret ways and conduct of the Almighty in the government of the world is beyond our province, that for man, so limited as he is in his understanding and faculties, to expect to satisfy himself in all the various ends and methods of the divine providence, is an unwarrantable presumption; that if difficulties in the natural world are every day acknowledg'd and acquiesc'd in, why
not

not likewise in the moral? in short, that it would be more becoming the character and station of man, to submit implicitly to the dispensations of heaven, however above his comprehension, than to presume to censure or direct the counsels of infinite wisdom. Such answers as these have been, and may, perhaps justly enough, be given; but how satisfactory they are like to prove in an inquisitive and free-thinking age, I need not say.

It may be worth our while therefore to consider this subject in another view. In doing which, I shall endeavour to establish the doctrine of the text on a reasonable foundation, by

I. Shewing in the *first* place, that the supposition of GOD's choosing to himself a *peculiar people*, is entirely reconcileable with his divine perfections, as governor of the world.

II. *Secondly*, that this method of providence might be a means fitted to answer such ends and purposes, as are worthy of infinite wisdom and goodness to have in view. And what will be said under these two heads, may help us,

III. In the *third* and *last* place, to account in some measure for certain difficulties we meet with, arising from the nature of the Jewish polity

polity and constitution, and may give us some sort of general satisfaction with regard to several passages that are excepted to, in the historical parts of the old Testament.

- I. *First* then I am to shew that the supposition of GOD's choosing to himself a *peculiar people*, is reconcileable with his divine perfections, as governor of the world.

If we here insist on the absolute power and dominion of GOD over his creatures, and his right of disposing them in what manner he pleases, as the creator and sovereign of all things, this will perhaps be said to be increasing instead of clearing the difficulty, and placing the divine government over us on no better a foundation, than mere arbitrary will, and uncontrollable authority. But tho' the divine government of the world be doubtless of a moral nature, and consequently founded in the reasons and truth of things, yet must it be remember'd that in many cases the actions of the Deity *must* be entirely *arbitrary*: as for instance, his constituting things in that particular manner in which we behold them, his creating the various ranks and subordinations of beings in the universe, his furnishing the earth with such a determinate number and such species of creatures, and his bestowing on them such different powers and different degrees of happiness.

happinefs. Such things as thefe muft be acknowledged to be of an *indifferent* nature, and where in the actions of the Deity muft appear, to *us* at leaft, to be perfectly *arbitrary*. As it is not therefore fo much as contended for, that G O D could not have acted otherwife than he has done, which would be to fuppose an abfolute fatality in things; fo neither on the other hand will it be faid, that his moral attributes, his juftice, goodnefs &c. muft require him to deal equally with all his creatures, to place them in the fame rank, to inveft them with the fame privileges, and to beftow on them the fame degrees of happinefs; becaufe this would be wholly deftroying that beauty and harmony of the creation, which refult from the infinite variety, dependance, and fubordinate connexion of parts in the univerfal fcheme.

To apply then what has been faid to the point under confideration. If it be not unreafonable nor unfit that the Deity fhould conftitute fuch a diverfity of things, if he has imparted his favours fo variously and unequally amongft his creatures, and his providence has thought fit to blefs fome with fuperiority of rank, and advantages of being beyond others, why may we not fuppose it equally confiftent with his wifdom and goodnefs, to fhew particular marks of favour and bounty to a particular people? how infinitely diverfified

verified must be the condition of creatures from the highest order to the lowest? and what various degrees of happiness communicated through the intermediate chain? how different the advantages and capacities of intellectual beings, not only of a different species, but even betwixt individuals of the same? how visible a disparity in point of health, fortune, genius, knowledge, riches, honours? are not some men, like darlings of providence, even the envy and delight of mankind, whilst others are so miserably despicable as to be the scoff and jest of the world? that all this is the work of providence either mediately, or immediately, will not, I presume, be denied by any. Is it therefore absolutely incredible that the like providential distinctions should be made betwixt particular nations and peoples, *as such*? or has not the common father of all men the same right over his children considered in a national, as in a private capacity? The truth in fact is, though it may not be so duly reflected on as it ought, that the ordinary providence of God has made a very remarkable distinction between nations in general, both as to real blessings, as well as outward advantages of life. What a different scene of things do we behold in those countries where learning, liberty, and science are cultivated, from what appears in the unblest'd regions of ignorance and barbarity?

And

And how unlike the face of mankind, where the arts of ingenuity and politeness flourish, to what is seen in the rude unpolish'd corners of the earth? If it be therefore agreeable to the justice and goodness of GOD, in the ordinary course of his providence to bless some nations in so conspicuous a manner, whilst others seem neglected, and as it were the very out-cast of heaven, it cannot certainly be pronounc'd inconsistent with the same justice and goodness, that he should manifest himself to some one particular people still more signally than to others, and that he should exercise his providence over them in so immediate and extraordinary a way, as that he might be emphatically said to be *their God*, and they to be *his people*. But the unhappiness is, that in mens reasonings concerning providence, those ordinary inequalities and differences observable in things, are from their commonness either wholly overlook'd and disregarded, or thought to have no manner of difficulty in them; whereas the unusualness of an extraordinary interposition makes the accounts given of it, and the effects that are attributed to it, mysterious and incredible. But it ought to be consider'd at the same time, that if the Deity may at all interpose in an extraordinary way, (which I shall here take it for granted he may) then can it not be said *absolutely* to be improbable that he has

done so, nor can the infrequency of the thing be an argument against it's reality.

I would not dismiss this part of my subject without observing once for all, that the objection against this doctrine, which seems to go upon the absurdity of supposing one people so highly favour'd above others, if it has any force in it, proves too much; for if it be an impeachment of the divine equity and justice to suppose him shewing particular marks of favour in one case, it must be so in all, and consequently the same way of arguing will be conclusive against any single advantage, *as such*, which one man, or one people, or one species of creatures may enjoy above another.

After all, it will be said, that this explanation of the doctrine is by no means sufficient to account for so wonderful a conduct of the divine providence, without assigning some special end and design in view: that the Deity does not go out of the ordinary road of nature upon trifling occasions, he does not want to shew his authority over mankind, nor to exercise an *arbitrary* power; unless therefore some extraordinary end is to be answer'd by it, the difficulty still remains in it's full force; which leads me to my proposal under my *second* head.

II. Which

II. Which is to shew, that this method of providence, *the choosing a peculiar people*, might be a means admirably fitted to promote such ends and purposes as are worthy of infinite wisdom and goodness to have in view.

The first end therefore which I will suppose to be obtain'd by this dispensation of providence, might be to preserve and continue in the world the knowledge and worship of the *one true God*. It would, I imagine, be a needless undertaking to inform any one, who has the least acquaintance with the history of those ages, that this knowledge and worship were really in danger of being lost. The world was universally overspread with gross idolatry, and we know not which to be most surpriz'd at, the early and general defection of mankind from the true GOD, or the great variety and multiplicity of false Gods that were introduc'd in his room. Not only the more remarkably ignorant and savage parts of the earth, but even those nations who boasted of their learning and accomplishments in arts and sciences were involv'd in the same common corruption. Nay, so far were these latter from endeavouring, or being able to reform the world in this point, that they seem to have labour'd to propagate the errors of idolatry as much as possible ;

fible; and if any of the wiser sort among them, their philosophers or priests, had just and true notions of the divine nature, yet so little communicative were they of them, that they thought it their duty, or their interest at least, to hide them from the common people by fabulous and hieroglyphical inventions, and so to disguise them in strange dresses, as to turn the whole of their religion into unintelligible mystery and allegory. Indeed were we to contemplate the general condition of mankind through all its various shapes and appearances of idolatry, it would present us with a view of human nature so unpleasant and unaccountably perverted, so reproachful to the boasted dignity of the species, and so unworthy the character of reason, that scarce the least traces of a rational religion would be discernible. Not only the heavenly host and nobler branches of the creation, but every part of the mere animal and vegetable world could supply them with objects of their worship; and least these should fail, they could raise to themselves new deities from *the work of their own hands, even wood and stone; the residue thereof, saith the prophet, he maketh a god, even his graven image: he falleth down unto it, and worshipeth it, and prayeth unto it, and saith, deliver me, for thou art my God. And none considereth in his heart, neither is there knowledge nor understanding*

to

to say, I have burnt part of it in the fire, yea also I have baked bread upon the coals thereof; I have roasted flesh and eaten it, and shall I make the residue thereof an abomination? shall I fall down to the stock of a tree? †

Such was the degeneracy of mankind in this important article, and, unless the divine providence should think fit to interpose some way or other, to vindicate the honour of his name, and to retrieve men in some measure from the uncomfortable state of living *without God in the World*, such was it like to continue. It should seem therefore at first sight not unreasonable to suppose, that GOD might vouchsafe to reveal himself in such a manner, and to such chosen instruments of his providence, as should be a means to revive and fix his authority and worship *somewhere* in the world, and to convey them to succeeding ages. The particular method for the more effectual accomplishing this end, were better left to infinite wisdom to determine, than for us to point out. Let us however but suppose it might be done in the following manner: -- By selecting and appropriating a particular people to be the immediate instruments for it in the hands of providence; by GOD's manifesting himself to this people in so clear and undeniable a manner as to establish his name and worship a-

† *Isai.* 44. 17. 19.

mong them effectually; by occasional revelations and miraculous interpositions, to give them such strong evidence and assurance of his presence with them, as to leave no room for doubt or uncertainty; by making it the very terms and condition of their being, *as a nation*, to separate themselves from the idolatrous nations, and to adhere only to the one true GOD; by making the acknowledgment and worship of the one true GOD not only the foundation of their religion, but likewise the essence even of their civil polity and constitution; by annexing therefore to the observance and violation of this law, the civil factions of temporal rewards and punishments; by giving them prosperity and victory over their enemies upon their obedience, defeat and ruin upon their disobedience; by appointing them farther such particular rites and ceremonies, as should serve them for the distinguishing badges and character of their profession, and be a standing visible memorial, to remind them whose service they were engag'd in; and lastly, for the more effectual security of this constitution, by giving them such *positive* laws and institutions, as should best preserve them from the infection of their idolatrous neighbours, and at the same time be accommodated in some measure to the particular genius and temper and prejudices of the people themselves. It need not be
fug-

suggested that the description here given is not imaginary, but exactly applicable to the *Jewish* state and nation, when fairly represented from their history in the old testament: and farther that it carries with it principles neither absurd nor ridiculous, but perfectly agreeable to the unprejudic'd sentiments of mankind, and to a reasonable way of thinking.

But it may be objected that such a scheme of providence as this, could not be adequate to the end propos'd, that it could by no means answer the design of GOD's redeeming mankind from a state of idolatry, to make himself known to one single inconsiderable people only, whilst the rest of the world would still lie under the same disadvantages now as ever, and without any visible means of recovering the truth. Why should it not be thought a more compleat and expeditious method, at once to enlighten the whole race of mankind, to extend the knowledge of the true GOD to the world in general, and thus effectually to extirpate the powers of idolatry from off the face of the earth?

But I must beg leave to observe here, that the force of this objection has been already taken notice of, and consider'd under my former head, it amounting in the main to no more than this, the supposition of the inequity and unsuitness of a partial distribution of divine favours. And consequently

frequently every revelation which is not universal, and every other particular blessing of providence is equally affected by the objection.

But besides this, let us but reflect a little on the probable consequence that might be expected from so universal a manifestation of providence, as this objection implies. We suppose then the whole world to be once in full possession of this great point, the acknowledgment and worship of the true **GOD**; it will be thought expedient, I presume, that much the same means should be made use of to guard and preserve the sacred treasure, as were necessary under the *Jewish* dispensation, that is, that **GOD** by a continued series of miracles and extraordinary revelations should awaken men's minds from time to time, and by making fresh discoveries of himself as occasion required, effectually secure his authority and government over them. But would not this be in effect to defeat the very end of an extraordinary interposition? Would not those very supernatural acts of providence lose all their force and weight, by being made familiar to mankind, and exhibited in so free and undistinguishing a manner to the view of the whole world? If it was so difficult to keep the *Jews* from idolatry who had the particular benefit of miracles vouchsafed them for that purpose, how much more difficult must it have been upon this supposition

to have kept any one part of mankind to their duty, whilst they would have no *particular* mark or criterion to judge of the divine authority over them, but what was common likewise to every other part of the world in *general*? The efficacy of miracles 'tis well known is deriv'd from their scarcity and uncommonness; but could it so happen that the world should be govern'd by miraculous interpositions, it would be difficult to discern, besides the absurdity of the supposition, how miracles could be of any service as an evidence or attestation of any truths being of divine authority: so far from it, that what is now call'd wonderful and extraordinary in nature, would then cease to be so, and could be look'd upon as no other than the ordinary and usual administration of providence, that is, in the strict sense, there would be no such thing as miracles at all. It is possible therefore that this method of providence might not be so effectual to the end propos'd, as to deserve the preference to that we plead for.

Perhaps it might still be said, if this end were really of that importance, and so worthy the divine providence to have in view as is pretended, an omnipotent power might doubtless continually over-rule and influence the mind of man in an irresistible manner, and force the conviction of truth upon him beyond all possibility

of withstanding it's evidence. 'Tis true; and the same might be done likewise in every other point of importance, both as to principle and practice; but how consistent this would be with the freedom of man, as a moral agent, or with the nature and end of religion itself, is too obvious to deserve a serious confutation.

But it may not be impertinent to observe here, that what seems to be a chief cause of that difficulty of accounting for so extraordinary a method of providence as the *Jewish* dispensation, is this, that the end propos'd by it, the establishing the knowledge and worship of the true GOD, is not thought to be really a matter of that great importance, which we make it. It seems to be a fashionable way of thinking with some men, tho' they are not always forward to speak out, that the whole of morality is confin'd within the meer *social* duties of life, that right or wrong notions concerning Deity and worship are in themselves of little significancy, provided the laws of justice, benevolence, and honesty are maintain'd amongst men; and those who call themselves *moral philosophers* do not make it a part of their system to have any regard to particular modes or institutions of religion, but think all of them alike indifferent, and none of them necessary to constitute any part of the *moral* character. As I apprehend therefore it would be

an affront to those gentlemen's understandings, to suppose them to be influenc'd by any principles of religion, I would choose to expostulate with them upon their own principles, of reason and moral fitness. ---- Can it then seriously be thought by rational creatures, that the service and worship of the Deity are really of an indifferent nature, or an inconsiderable part of duty? Is it in itself fit or reasonable, that he from whom our whole dependance, our life, and the blessings of our life are deriv'd, should be himself neglected by us? or is he, who is the author of all good, the governor and father of all beings, himself the only being in the universe, with whom we are unconcern'd? Can we admire this beautiful structure of nature, the order, harmony, and proportion of parts, all uniting to constitute universal beauty, and yet exclude from our regards the great artist and contriver of the whole? Is it right to acknowledge the excellence and obligations of moral virtue, it's necessary tendency to promote our good and final happiness, without carrying our thoughts to that being, who is the essence and perfection of all good, the fountain of rectitude and truth? Is it possible that from the fitness of action, and the eternal relations of things, there should result duties of gratitude, benevolence, and honour betwixt creatures to each other, and no homage to

to be paid to the adorable creator, the common parent and center of our happiness? Has our first and best benefactor no right to any returns of service and acknowledgments from us, or have we no farther expectations from him, that we should say, *what is the almighty that we should serve him, and what profit should we have, if we pray unto him?* Surely, his relation to us is not so remote, nor his authority over us so ill founded in nature, but that he has the justest claim to every expression of our gratitude and love, to every instance of our obedience and worship. How imperfect then must that scheme of morality be, which should make matters of religion a superficial and unessential part of our duty, which ought in reason and fitness to be our first and chiefest care? I will conclude therefore, that the knowledge and worship of the true GOD is an article of importance, the preserving and continuing of which in the world, was an end worthy of infinite wisdom and goodness to have in view.

Another end to be obtain'd by this institution of a *peculiar people*, might be in order to afford mankind more clear and uncontested proofs of a divine providence, inspecting and influencing human affairs. Though the doctrine of a providence has been almost universally receiv'd and taught

taught in the world, yet it is much to be question'd whether it owes it's general reception so much to men's observations upon the ordinary and settled course of providence in nature, as to the more remarkable extraordinary Events they have been eye-witnesses to themselves, and the traditional accounts of miracles, and wonderful interpositions they have receiv'd from others. It has been before hinted, that what is uniform and constant in the proceedings of providence is pass'd by unregarded, whilst any thing uncommon and strange commands attention, and puts men upon thinking. The periodical motions of the heavenly bodies, the stated returns of seasons, the succession and growth of plants and Animals according to fixt settled laws of nature and the like, are doubtless in themselves the strongest proof of a divine power superintending and conducting the whole; but then they are *common* things, and so much within the compass of every days observation, that they are for that reason scarce observ'd at all; they are too familiar with mankind to have any respect paid them; and they lose their weight by that, which in truth ought to give them their whole weight, their regularity and constancy. In short, something new and surprizing is wanted to awaken men's reasoning faculties, and to lead them by *particular* instances of an interposing power, to the

the acknowledgment of the *general* truth, which the ordinary course of things does not give them sufficient occasion to reflect on. And hence probably we may account for the rise of some of those absurd doctrines in the heathen philosophy, such as *fatalism* and *epicurism*, that some observing a settled and unvaried course of nature, and a regular concurrence of like causes and effects, have attributed all to an uncontrollable fate and destiny; whilst others, for want of some more sensible proof of a divine agency than the ordinary appearances of things, have depos'd the Deity from the government of the world, as too indolent a being, and placed at the head of it blind chance and fortune in his stead. And indeed considering the thoughtlessness and inattention of the generality of mankind, it is almost impossible but that the belief of a providence must have been entirely lost in the world, without some extraordinary visible instances of it set before them, to refresh their memories, and keep it alive. Indeed were we to suppose the scriptures to be a true account of things, we should there find, GOD had sufficiently provided for the support of this doctrine from the beginning of the world; that *he left not himself without witnesses*, but from time to time made such discoveries of himself, to the *first* generation of men, then to *Noah*, to *Abraham*, to the *Patriarchs*,
and

and lastly to the *Jewish* people, as should abundantly testify his providential care and concern for his creatures.

Should it be here urg'd, that a more extensive manifestation of his providence to the world in general, had been a more effectual means to the end propos'd, the force of the objection has been already consider'd, and need not be repeated. The *Jewish* dispensation was evidently sufficient to answer the design; it was calculated not only to convince the *Jews* themselves of the immediate hand of providence among them, but to convey likewise an instructive lesson to the world around, and the opportunities the neighbouring nations had of acquainting themselves with it, were frequent and great; especially when we consider the several captivities and oppressions which befell the *Jews* under the *Egyptians*, *Babylonians*, *Greeks* and *Romans*, who cannot be suppos'd to have been wholly ignorant of their religion, whilst their intercourse and conversation with them could not but invite their curiosity to enquire into it, and to examine on what foundation it stood.

A third end of providence in the *Jewish* institution, might be to prepare the way for, and to introduce a more perfect dispensation. The whole scheme of christianity is evidently built on
the

the supposition of previous revelations: both our blessed Saviour and his apostles do constantly appeal to the authority and writings of the old Testament, for proofs of their divine mission, and to confirm the truth of their doctrines. *The law was a school-master, to bring men unto Christ*, in every sense, partly as it consisted of several rites and institutions so adapted, as to serve for typical representations of better things under the gospel, and partly as it contain'd a gradual series of prophecies leading men to the expectations of a Messiah, in whom they were to receive their accomplishment; but above all, as it tended to open men's minds for the more readily embracing christianity itself, by giving them previous notions of revelation, and a miraculous providence, by furnishing them with such preparative principles as might overcome all prejudice, and by displaying the beauty and excellency of the gospel-dispensation, when compar'd with the former institution, as only introductory to it.

It seems to be agreeable to the general design of providence in the government of the world, to enlighten it by slow steps and gradual advances, not to over-power our weak sight with the sudden glare of truth, but to leave it to make it's own way by gentle degrees, 'till it be arriv'd from it's first dawn of light to it's full meridian. There is evidently a regular disposition and plan laid out

out by providence in the moral world, as well as in the natural, where things do not shoot up to their full stature at once, but are left to time and growth to ripen and bring them to maturity. The progress of arts and sciences, the advancements in learning and philosophy, the various embellishments of life by new and useful discoveries, have not been the work of one age or country, but the growing labours and experience of many generations, and the wisdom of succeeding times has been but improvements upon the former. And so it is in religion: the knowledge of divine truths has been propagated gradually and at different periods of time: revelations were made to the *first* ages but sparingly and darkly; more distinct ones afterwards to *Abraham* and the *Patriarchs*; still more open and express were the declarations of the will of God to the *Jews*, by his servant *Moses*; the word of prophecy grew yet plainer and was better understood, as it was deliver'd at *sundry times* through the succeeding generations; and lastly, *when the fulness of the time was come*, God sent forth his Son. *when the fulness of the time was come*: that is, when the world was sufficiently prepar'd to admit him, when the preceding revelations wanted higher improvements, when the types and shadows of the law were to give way to the substance, when the prophecies were to be verified,

D

when

when the general condition of mankind was such as might dispose them to a favourable entertainment of the truth, when civility and politeness had so soften'd their manners, as to leave them free and open to religious impressions, when the notions of revelation and miracles were not so strange and unknown in the world, but that they might probably meet with a fair hearing, when men's doubts and perplexities in religious matters might have render'd a rational system of religion acceptable and desirable, when in short, men were no longer babes in knowledge, but *had need of strong meat*, as the apostle expresses it, instead of *milk*, did not require their childish appetites to be gratified with mere rituals and pompous externals, but were able to digest the more substantial nourishment of inward righteousness, piety and truth.

Thus does revelation appear to be a uniform and consistent scheme; there is a connexion between it's parts; and we cannot but adore the wisdom and beneficence of it's kind author, from it's first beginnings, through it's several steps and openings, it's gradual progress and growth, 'till brought to that most excellent and happy state, which, did we but know our happiness, we should read in the dispensation of christianity. And how far the same good providence may have order'd the future disposition of things,
 whe-

whether the improvements and perfection of religion be not reserv'd for after times, whether some distant ages of posterity may not be blest'd with the true faith and practice of the gospel, freed from popish and all superstitious mixtures, whether it may not one day be profess'd in it's genuine purity, and be profess'd universally, GOD only knows. Such expectations however, the methods of providence hitherto observable do certainly give us some grounds for, and intimations of this kind from scripture itself seem not a little to countenance.

Thus have I endeavoured to vindicate the *Jewish* dispensation, as a rational scheme, by reconciling the doctrine of a *peculiar people*, with the divine attributes, and by shewing it to be a method of providence fitted to such ends and designs, as are worthy of infinite wisdom and goodness to have in view.

III. It now remains in the *third* and *last* place, that from the foregoing doctrine thus stated and explain'd, we endeavour to account in some measure for certain difficulties we meet with in the *Jewish* history, and to give some sort of general satisfaction with regard to several passages that are excepted to in the old Testament.

I would

I would observe *first* then, that one thing which has given great offence to nice enquirers, to a late author in particular, is, that the *Jews* should be represented as the select and favourite people of G O D, without the least degree of merit, or virtue to entitle them to so great a privilege: so far from it, that they were a most obstinate and incorrigible race of men, with the utmost difficulty kept to their duty, and remarkable rather for their ignorance and rebellions against G O D, than for any real sanctity or goodness in them. Even their celebrated heroes and leaders were often but the foremost of the people in vice and wickedness; nay *David* himself, *the man after God's own heart*, could perpetrate the most flagitious and shocking crimes, attended with every aggravating circumstance of the most complicated guilt and horror. That all this may be but too justly said, I believe we may safely grant, but whether it is any thing to the purpose for which it is alledg'd, must be question'd. For was it the design of G O D in the *Jewish* institution to choose out a people remarkable for their virtue and piety beyond others, in order only to shower down his blessings upon them, and to distinguish them by particular marks of favour, answerable to their personal merit? by no means: but it was for other ends of his providence in the government of the world;

it

it was to make them instruments in his hands for the executing those purposes his infinite wisdom had ordain'd. They are therefore to be consider'd only in their publick capacity, as a nation set apart for that end, and not whether they deserv'd upon their *own* account to be call'd a holy and peculiar people to the Lord. And that they might not themselves mistake their own condition, they are often enough told both by *Moses* and their prophets, that *the Lord gave them not the good land to possess for their righteousness, for that they were a stiff-necked and rebellious generation, but that he might perform the word which he swore unto their fathers, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob*: † That is, that by them he might carry on the designs of his providence, first made known to those *Patriarchs*, and afterwards to be compleated gradually by their posterity. So that the perversion of those blessings they enjoy'd is no more an argument against the institution itself, than the abuses of any other providential advantages, which may be put into mens hands, can be an argument against providence itself. Private characters therefore, or the moral character of the people in general are things foreign to the subject, and the conduct of particular persons must not be accountable for that, which has no relation to it.

† *Deut.* 9. 5, 6 &c.

Thus

Thus for instance, the character of *David* is of a very mix'd nature; for though it is stain'd with great vices and manifest deviations from his duty, yet did he discharge his publick office in the state with the utmost fidelity; in that part of it especially on which the welfare of the people depended, and which was made the test of their obedience, the rooting out all idolatry, no king was ever so vigilant as *David*, none so active and zealous for the service and worship of the true GOD. And thus did he so eminently contribute to the advancement of religion, and consequently to the carrying on the designs of providence, that it might be truly said of him, that *his heart was perfect with the Lord his God.* † But then his vices are no part of that character, nor are they recommended to our Imitation. *

Again, when the *Jews* are invidiously represented as the favourite people of GOD, and as if in the full enjoyment of all temporal happiness and prosperity, under the continual sunshine of heaven; this is so far from a just representation, that the contrary is most true. For the state of that people was a state of discipline and probation, their prosperity depended upon their obedience, and they were no longer

† 1 *Kings* 11. 4. * See the *moral philosopher*, p. 324. who asserts that even the "*vices and moral wickedness of David had been approv'd of, and justifi'd.*"

entitled to the blessings of heaven, than they were strict observers of it's laws. True indeed it is, that the *having God so nigh unto them*, and receiving immediate revelations from him was a great and inestimable privilege, but the happiness they in fact enjoy'd is not to be computed from the excellency of this privilege, but from their own behaviour under it, and conformity to it's directions. And how successful they were in securing themselves this happiness, almost every page of their history but too evidently shews. Consider the many grievous hardships, oppressions, and captivities they suffer'd from time to time under the neighbouring nations. Were they not literally *scourges and thorns in their sides* to execute the wrath of GOD upon them, whenever they departed from him, and fell into idolatry? In short, their afflictions kept equal pace with their transgressions, and their transgressions were so frequent, that their condition upon the whole will appear perhaps but little to be envy'd, and the share of happiness they enjoy'd will scarce be thought to exceed the miseries they endur'd.

But what seems to be the most usual and most material objection against the divine authority of the *Jewish* institution is, that their political maxims of government were of a very inhuman and persecuting nature; they treated their enemies

mies with excessive cruelty ; they were not contented barely to conquer, unless they could utterly destroy even every thing that breath'd amongst them with the edge of the sword ; and, contrary to the law of nature and nations, they commenc'd hostilities, and exercis'd the most unjust acts of oppression upon their neighbours, oftentimes without any other provocation than that of worshipping other Gods, and professing a different religion. --- It will be observ'd, that the objection, as I have here stated it, is not design'd to represent the truth of the case as it was in reality, but rather the manner in which infidels of the present age affect to talk of it. For I hope it may be made appear, that the *Jewish* government was not founded upon principles either of persecution or inhumanity, and that it did not in itself tend to injure the persons or properties of others, unless when some particular circumstances and extraordinary occasions made severity necessary. The objection therefore in the general is not just, but to be understood in a reserv'd sense, and with great limitations. In order therefore to satisfy ourselves in this matter, let us but cast an eye back upon the state of the *Jewish* people, and see what might be expected from a government so constituted and circumstanc'd, as theirs was.

We will suppose then the *Jews* to be a people selected by divine providence for such ends and purposes, as have been already mention'd: if so, it must necessarily follow, that their civil polity or constitution must have been quite different from that of any other people, that is, they must have acted upon different maxims, they must have used other methods for the security and preservation of the state; for as their religious and civil establishment were one and the same, so what tended to the hurt of the one, must equally endanger the other, and consequently the protection of their religion was the proper business of the state, and the protection of the state was no other than a religious duty. It was made the terms and condition of their being, as a nation, to separate themselves from the idolatrous nations, and to adhere only to the one true GOD; whatsoever therefore was done contrary to, or inconsistent with this original compact, if I may so call it, was the destruction of the body politick, it was a forfeiture of the covenant, and by that means a dissolution of the government. We are to consider moreover, the land of *Canaan* was assign'd the *Jews* as the proper *lot of their inheritance*, wherein they were to subsist in their national capacity, under subjection to GOD as their king and governor, to whom alone they were to pay all obedience both civil

and religious. It was therefore plainly contrary to the law of empire, and no other than an act of rebellion against the state to allow any competitor in this kingdom, which the admitting any other GOD was in effect to do. "All idolatry was therefore to be rooted out of the bounds of the kingdom,"† not barely because it was professing a different religion, but because it was virtually acknowledging another king, and withdrawing their allegiance from their lawful sovereign.

In this view then if we consider the state of the *Jews*, we shall find they were often oblig'd to treat their enemies with great rigour for their own preservation; lenity and mildness would have been inconsistent with their safety and well-being; and we are not hastily to ascribe every instance of severity to the natural cruelty of the people, the peevishness of their leaders, or the perverted politicks of their priests and prophets, but it was evidently their law, their government, their political constitution that requir'd it. For example, as the land of *Canaan* was to be the place of their settlement, they were first to dispossess the inhabitants by force of arms; this they were enjoyn'd to execute to the utmost extremity, even to the utter extirpation of every thing that belong'd to them; but then this was

† See *Lock*. I. Let. Tol. p. 247 &c. fol.

for reasons extraordinary, and peculiar to the circumstances of the *Jews*; for as their success and even being depended upon their keeping themselves a *separate people*, and as by this means they were to be the instruments of providence in preserving true religion, so nothing could more effectually engage them in their duty, nothing could give them a stronger sense of the importance of obedience, and at the same time a greater detestation of all idolatrous practices, than to find idolaters so odious in the sight of God himself, as to be thought not worthy to be treated upon the common level with their fellow creatures, but to be cut off, both they and the remembrance of them, as much as possible from the face of the earth. --- Add to this, that the *Jews* were of themselves but too well inclin'd to idolatry, and exceedingly debauch'd by the *Egyptian* superstitions, of which they had given very manifest tokens already; would it not then have been extremely dangerous to have allow'd them any intercourse or dealings with idolatrous neighbours? How could it be expected they should long continue in their duty, when they were so easily seduc'd by every the least temptation? And this is expressly mention'd in scripture as the grounds of those severe injunctions they were to observe towards the *seven* nations of *Canaan*: *they shall not dwell in thy land, lest they make thee sin*

sin against me. ---- And when the Lord thy God shall deliver them before thee, thou shalt smite them, and utterly destroy them, thou shalt make no covenant with them, nor shew mercy unto them: neither shalt thou make marriages with them; thy daughter thou shalt not give unto his son, nor his daughter shalt thou take unto thy son. For they will turn away thy son from following me, that they may serve other Gods: so will the anger of the Lord be kindled against you, and destroy thee suddenly. † And innumerable other texts to the same purpose.

But the harshness of those commands will be much soften'd, if we consider farther, that these nations were not only guilty of the grossest idolatry, but, 'tis more than probable, were overrun likewise with monstrous vices and enormities, which deservedly drew down the divine vengeance upon their heads. And that this is not mere conjecture will appear, amongst other passages, from the following words of *Moses*. *Speak not thou in thine heart, after that the Lord thy God hath cast them out from before thee, saying, for my righteousness the Lord hath brought me in to possess this land: but for the wickedness of these nations, the Lord doth drive them out from before thee. Not for thy righteousness, or for the uprightness of thine heart, dost thou go to possess their*

† *Exod. 23. 33. Deut. 7. 2, 3, 4.*

land: but for the wickedness of these nations, the Lord thy God doth drive them out from before thee. † In this light therefore we are to look upon the *Jews* as no other than occasional instruments in the hands of providence to execute the judicial punishments of heaven upon a wicked and an apostate people.

It will add great weight to what has been here said, to observe that by the law of *Moses*, there was a very essential distinction made between the *Canaanitish* nations, and those that were more remote. For as these latter were not within the bounds of their kingdom, and they were in less danger of being corrupted by them, they were therefore in proportion to be treated with less rigour, and more agreeably to the common law of arms. As I imagine this distinction to be of great importance, I will beg leave to repeat the passage at length. *When thou comest nigh unto a city to fight against it, then proclaim peace unto it. And it shall be, if it make thee answer of peace, and open unto thee, then it shall be that all the people that is found therein, shall be tributaries unto thee, and they shall serve thee. And if it will make no peace with thee, but will make war against thee, then thou shalt besiege it. And when the Lord thy God hath delivered it into thine hands, thou shalt smite every male there-*

† Deut. 9. 4. 5.

of with the edge of the sword. But the women, and the little ones, and the cattle, and all that is in the city, even all the spoil thereof shalt thou take unto thy self: and thou shalt eat the spoil of thine enemies, which the Lord thy God hath given thee. Thus shalt thou do unto all the cities which are very far off from thee, which are not of the cities of these nations. But of the cities of these people which the Lord thy God doth give thee for an inheritance, thou shalt save alive nothing that breatheth: but thou shalt utterly destroy them, namely, the Hittites, and the Amorites, the Canaanites, and the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites, as the Lord thy God hath commanded thee: that they teach you not to do after all their abominations, which they have done unto their Gods, so should ye sin against the Lord your God. † The moral philosopher from this passage has taken the liberty to represent the Jews as in a state of war with all mankind, and that by their “constitution and the fundamental principles of Moses, they were to maintain no peace or amity with any other nation or people, but on condition of submitting to them as their subjects, slaves, and tributaries, under such terms as they should think fit to impose.” * Whereas the design of this law was quite otherwise; it was plainly to shew the difference to be observ’d towards the inhabitants of

† Deut. 20. 10 — 18. * See the moral philosopher, p. 29.

Canaan, and all other distant nations with whom at any time they should *happen* to be engag'd in war, which latter, because it was consistent with the publick good, and the circumstances of their government permitted, were therefore to be dealt with according to the equitable rules of war, and the practice of nations.

But it will be said there is a remarkable exception to this in the case of the *Amalekites*, which as it is of an extraordinary nature, and has been of late much objected to, may deserve briefly to be consider'd. We read in the history of *Saul*, that the prophet *Samuel* without any immediate provocation comes to *Saul* with this message, *thus saith the Lord of hosts, I remember that which Amalek did to Israel, how he laid wait for him in the way when he came up from Egypt. Now go, and smite Amalek, and utterly destroy all that they have, and spare them not; but slay both man and woman, infant and suckling, ox and sheep, camel and ass.* † All this is ascrib'd by the *moral philosopher* to a low piece of revenge in *Samuel* against *Saul*, in order to accomplish whose destruction, he pretends this hard sentence to be pronounc'd by GOD on an innocent people, for injuries done by their ancestors many generations before.* But had he been dispos'd to do justice to the history, he had represented

† 1 Sam. 15. 2, 3. * See the *moral philosopher*, p. 298.

it in another light. He would have found the *Amalekites* had been one of the first and most malicious enemies the *Israelites* had ever met with. And instead of making them the “brave” “defenders of their country, against the invasion” “and attack of a proud, insulting enemy,” † as he expresses it, he would have call’d them not only the first aggressors, but even the most ungenerous and merciless race of men in the world. For if the testimony of *Moses* is rather to be credited than his, they not only *came out and fought with Israel*, * but their malice was accompany’d with peculiar circumstances of inhuman treachery and baseness: for, *they met them by the way, and smote the hindmost of them, even all that were feeble behind them, when they were faint and weary; for they feared not God.* ** It seems then the *Israelites* were in a weak and languishing condition, and so far from being formidable at present, as has been insinuated, *** that had they not been supported by some power more than human, they must in all probability have perish’d without any resistance. It was therefore both cruelty and cowardice in *Amalek* thus to fall on a defenceless people; and if the judgments of heaven may ever be suppos’d to hang over a nation for national guilt, then is it not

† *Ibid.* p. 270. * *Exod.* 17. 8. ** *Deut.* 25. 18. *** See Mr. Chubb.

unreasonable to suppose the curse of GOD to be entail'd on this nation, and their posterity for ever. The part therefore which *Samuel* acted in this affair was no more than his office, as the faithful prophet and servant of the Lord; he had found it recorded in their annals, and made an indispensable duty of their law, that *Amalek* must be destroy'd: *for the Lord had said unto Moses, write this for a memorial in a book, and rehearse it in the ears of Joshua: for I will utterly put out the remembrance of Amalek from under Heaven.* † and again is it repeated with stronger emphasis, *therefore it shall be, when the Lord thy God hath given thee rest from all thine enemies round about, in the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee for an inheritance to possess it, that thou shalt blot out the remembrance of Amalek from under heaven; thou shalt not forget it.* *

I hope it may appear from what has been said, that it was not the natural tendency of the *Jewish* constitution to encourage cruelty and inhumanity: but that they were extraordinary cases, and such as were peculiar to the circumstances of the *Jews*, that oblig'd them sometimes to those rigorous methods of proceeding, which otherwise they could not have justified. And this will receive farther confirmation, if we con-

† *Exod.* 17. 14. * *Deut.* 25. 19.

sider the nature of the moral part of their law, as it respected the people in their private capacity. For tho' the *Mosaical* law is often represented in an invidious light as consisting of nothing but burdensome rituals and superstitious ceremonies, yet certain it is their great lawgiver did not forget to teach his people the duties also of private life, and to instill into them principles of benevolence, charity, and every social virtue. And tho' from the nature of their constitution, as has been shewn, their publick character may appear at first sight somewhat less amiable, yet as to private behaviour, every thing excellent and lovely, kind and compassionate was most studiously and affectionately inculcated by *Moses*. Hospitality to strangers, † bounty and goodness to the poor, † generosity to an enemy, * and friendly dispositions to all their neighbours. ** Or is there no good nature and humanity in such precepts as these? *When thou cuttest down thine harvest in thy field, and hast forgot a sheaf in the field, thou shalt not go again to fetch it: it shall be for the stranger, for the fatherless, and for the widow: that the Lord thy God may bless thee in all the work of thine hands. When thou beatest thine olive-tree, thou shalt not go over the boughs again:*

† *Lev.* 19. 33, 34 &c. † *Lev.* 25. 35. *Deut.* 24. 12, 13 &c.
* *Exod.* 23. 4, 5. ** *Lev.* 19. 17, 18. *Deut.* 22. 1, 2 &c.

it shall be for the stranger, for the fatherless, and for the widow, When thou gatherest the grapes of thy vineyard, thou shalt not glean it afterward: it shall be for the stranger, for the fatherless, and for the widow. And thou shalt remember that thou wast a bondman in the land of Egypt: therefore I command thee to do this thing. † In short, there are every where interspers'd throughout the *Mosaic* law injunctions of this kind, all evidently calculated to promote peace, and harmony, and brotherly love, and such as could not fail, had *they* not fail'd in the practice, to have render'd them a happy, and a good people.

I have now gone through with what I intended, but will beg leave, before I conclude, to offer a remark upon some wrong inferences that have been drawn for the *Jewish* dispensation, of a different sort from those above-mention'd, but which the subject before us naturally suggests. There have been some so far from lessening the authority of the *Jewish* scriptures, that they have carried it much too high, and built doctrines upon it, which it will by no means support. Thus for instance, because the civil government of the *Jews* was instituted by GOD himself, they have fancy'd no other government so *perfect*, but what

† *Deut.* 24. 19 &c.

is fram'd after the same model: for certainly should infinite wisdom vouchsafe to prescribe a particular form, it must doubtless be the best of any, and ought to be imitated as much as possible by all other civil societies. † --- But in truth, it was no part of the design of GOD in that institution to set mankind a model of government to copy after, since that of the *Jews* was peculiarly adapted to such circumstances of their own, and for the promoting such immediate views of providence, as no other people can possibly be concern'd with. Neither therefore would it any way derogate from it's divine original to suppose it to be not in itself a compleat form of government, because it was beside the intention of providence to give it any farther perfection, than what was sufficient to answer the end for which it was ordain'd.

But the ill consequences of this way of reasoning I am now speaking of, have been in no case so deplorably visible, as when *christians* from the authority and example of the *Jews*, have establish'd doctrines of persecution, and the exercise of the civil sword, in matters purely of a religious nature. How strangely have *Papists* perverted the spirit of the gospel, by making the constitution of the *Jewish* church, a warrant for

† *The moral philosopher affects to talk in this way, p. 373.*

the most inhuman cruelty and tyranny in the *Christian*? Whereas nothing can be more true, than that there is an essential difference in their nature and foundation, the one being incorporated by GOD himself into the state, and the other invested with no other civil authority, than what the wisdom of human legislatures may give it. For the *Jewish* laws relating to the extirpation of idolatry are to be consider'd as no other than the *positive* laws of the land, not of a *moral* and eternal obligation, but to subsist no longer than the duration of the state itself: and they can be look'd upon no more obligatory on *christians*, than any other part of the merely instituted, or ceremonial law can. To plead therefore for a right to the exercise of those powers over our brethren without an express authority from heaven, which authority the *Jews* had, is most impious and unwarrantable, injurious to the natural rights of mankind, and subversive of the very design itself of christianity. †

To conclude. The difficulties which attend the scriptures of the old Testament are not insuperable. But when they are perplex'd and misrepresented either through ignorance or design, it is easy to seduce the innocent and uncautious.

† See Mr. Lock's *first letter of toleration*.

'Tis the different light in which objects are placed, that gives them a different appearance. Vanity and affectation will often wrest things from their natural situation, in order to give them an undue colouring, but simplicity and truth will choose to view them in their native dress. --- But, let me ask, should we not expect from the very nature of things to meet with difficulties in the sacred books? Their very antiquity, the nature of their language, the manners, the customs, the popular notions of those early and distant times, are disadvantages we must inevitably lie under. Not to omit that brief and cursory manner, in which many things evidently in the historical parts are related. These and the like causes must needs render our knowledge of them in many instances but dark and imperfect at best; they do therefore in reason require such allowances to be made them, as are readily granted to other books in the like circumstances.

It will be in vain to urge that Revelation, which is design'd for the benefit of mankind, ought to be clear and plain in every instance; for if it be sufficiently clear and plain to answer the end design'd, it is enough, nothing more is necessary. If we plainly read in it a full and consistent scheme of the gracious dispensations of providence to mankind, and if we are taught
by

by it a perfect lesson of religion and virtue, the end of all revelation, would it not be inexcusable in us, should we wander out of the great path, in search of those little *stumbling-blocks*, not essential to the main design of it, and perhaps even foreign to it? In short, if men are sincerely dispos'd to embrace the truth, and will deal fairly in their enquiries, *not handling either the word of God, or themselves, deceitfully*, they will easily know of the doctrine, whether it be of God; but if they are not sincerely dispos'd, if they are resolv'd not to *hear Moses and the prophets*, neither will they be perswaded, though one rose from the Dead.

F I N I S.

[2]

7 JU 66

4474. CC. 110